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SOCIAL CONTROL. VIII.

ART.

ART is here meant in its broadest sense. It includes poetry, rhetoric, eloquence, painting, and sculpture—all those means, in short, whereby an idea wins peculiar force through its *form of expression*.

I.

How can art modify the feelings to the advantage of society?

(a) *By arousing the passions*.—Early art is seen in the direct service of corporate excitement. It supplies aids and symbols by which at gatherings the individual is spurred to a common emotion. All manner of festivals and feasts—war, religious, Bacchic, phallic—make use of the arts of representation. While there is a distinct value in anything that promotes a convergence of feeling upon a single sentiment, art serves society especially by arousing the passions of conflict. The warfare that preceded discipline was waged under great excitement. It was necessary to submerge the ordinary self-preservative instincts beneath a tide of fury. Hence the resort to drug and intoxicant, and hence also the choral song, the tribal chant, the wild dance, and the mimic warfare that preceded the rush upon the foe. Even in the later military organizations marching songs, war songs, watchwords, battle cries, inspiring bulletins, and eloquent words by chiefs serve to direct the ideas and impulses of a soldier to society's advantage. While within the group the social office of art must lie in taming man, its service in respect to the enemies of the group must consist in playing upon man's passions.

(b) *By kindling sympathy*.—The characteristic emotion art aims to arouse is, as Guyau insists,¹ social. It is the diffused

¹ *L'Art au point de vue sociologique*.

pleasure that comes in moments of enlargement and solidarity. Art is "an *ensemble* of means of producing that general and harmonious stimulation of the conscious life which constitutes the sentiment of the beautiful."¹ In times of decadence it may become merely a means for producing agreeable sensations, a kind of decorative fringe. But in its best estate it is interpretative and appeals to the emotions. "The true object of art is the expression of life." "It is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our compact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot."²

The taproot of selfishness is weakness of imagination. "We can sympathize only with what we can picture to ourselves; and the inability to feel for another simply means inability to grasp by means of the imagination the experiences through which that other is passing."³ So far as the artist by his warmth of imagination releases from the closed chamber of self he conciliates the individual and society. Oftener, however, his task is to give to sympathy range rather than force. Life rather than art is the first nurse of sympathy. But with most people their contacts with others are quite too few. Fellow feeling for those they meet is not enough because their life circle is too narrow. They need a magic that shall lift into view what is below their horizon. Perhaps the chief ethical function of art, therefore, is to supply those imaginative contacts by which local groups are conciliated and the segments of society cemented together.

The artist, like Le Sage's Asmodeus, waves aside all roofs. He shows us in another sex, class, lot, group, race, or age the old passions, longings, hopes, fears, and sorrows we have so often supped and bedded with. So he calls forth fellow feeling and knits anew the ever-raveling social web. Without his filaments to bind hearts together it is doubtful if the vast groups of today could last. Certainly a nation like ours could not endure without the mutual comprehension and sympathy established within the folk-mass by artists living and dead. It is they who

¹ *L'Art au point de vue sociologique*, p. 16.

² GEORGE ELIOT.

³ HUDSON, *The Church and Stage*, p. 68.

have put breath into the common past and joined men in love of it. It is they who have discovered the common character and enamored the people of its type. And they are still at work keeping all parts of the nation *en rapport*. The yoke of enforced coöperation galls fellow citizens, and it needs art to allay the irritation. Not slavery alone but the narrow sympathies of a provincial literature caused the South to drift away. East and West become alienated through clash of interests, but the story writers and playwrights come in and help the people of each section to understand the other.

This service of art is most signal in a vast democratic state embracing many kinds of life and many interests. Here, where only imperial ideas and grand policy can give success, comes the sternest test of popular government, for the mass of men are necessarily of few contacts and narrow experience. Unless the flagging imagination of the common man be stimulated to divine the multifarious life of his country, his will be no fit hands to hold the reins. Hence Greek and Italian and Swiss democracies were local, while empires had to be committed to leisured aristocracies or bred princes. An imperial democracy like ours is an experiment, and succeeds only because the press and a national literature inspire broad sympathies.

The man of genius, with his clairvoyant gift of seeing into all kinds of life and his power to make us feel that life as our very own, wins his most brilliant triumphs in modifying the relations of classes. The emancipation of negro slaves or Russian serfs is hastened because a Stowe or a Turgenieff makes them *comprehended*. A Dickens or a Reade is formidable to social abuses because he has the power to make us yokefellows of their victims. A Tolstoi or a Millet, by making the peasant *understood*, gives him a new social weight. Slaves, serfs, convicts, exiles, outcasts, sufferers of every sort gain strength the moment genius gives them a voice. Social struggles turn not wholly on the relative strength of classes, but in a measure on the degree to which a suffering class can convict the rest of common clay. What once was done by revolt is now often done by the mild

influence of a social art. "Put yourself in his place!" is the cry of the artist, and our obedience is the test of his genius.

Not all art is sociable. Conventional art, ornamental art, art that interprets nature—these aim to please rather than to socialize. But the kinds—like poetry, eloquence, novel, or drama—that deal with human life rather than forms or hues certainly modify moral character. The interest and sympathy they awaken is not virtue, but it is the seed-plot of the virtues and their natural climate. We are apt to regard culture as compatible with selfishness, but the iciest indifference of the man of culture is aglow compared with the absolute zero of heartlessness possible to the savage. There is little good art that has not in it something of the sociable, and he who has been long exposed to its humanizing influences cannot get away from the comprehension of his kind. His eyes have been opened, his imagination unsealed. At some point or other his interest in his fellow-men will betray him into generosity and demonstrate that art has made him a citizen of humanity.

(c) *By exploiting the æsthetic sense.*—It is in the power of art to foster goodness by making it beautiful and to blight badness by making it ugly. There are, of course, æsthetic elements in social conduct, and the artist in quest of beauty is the one to reveal them. But the lukewarm support the æsthetic sense of itself lends to morality is by no means enough for society in its stern conflict with the rampant individual will.¹ If the æsthetic will not of its own motion join the social banner, it must be pressed into service under leadership of the lords of the imagination. While some men naturally abominate selfishness, all men abominate filth; and by art it is possible so to link together the two that the loathing for defilement shall extend to self-seeking. When conscience is weak it can be reinforced by taste, so that he who is not saved by his sympathies may be saved even by his fastidiousness.

¹In "The Æsthetic Element in Morality" PROFESSOR SHARP concludes that the statement of Martineau that "the beauty of conduct is conditioned by its rightness" certainly represents "a serious error."

The artist weds the moral to the æsthetic by taking advantage of our feelings for person. The faces of saints are shown as clear and beautiful, while sinners are painted black and hideous. The poets and painters of a blond race will make evil men swarthy, while those of a dark race will make them red haired. In the epic and drama of our fair race the hero is a tall blonde, while the villain is small and dark. Physical deficiencies such as the hunchback or the clubfoot get so associated with evil character as to breed great injustice. Avarice besets young and old, fair and foul. Yet art has coupled it indissolubly in our minds with the filthy person, yellow skin, and long, bony, clutching fingers of an old man.

Besides putting a shadow into the face of a sinner and a halo about the head of the saint, art polarizes our feelings in regard to types of deed and character. In literature unruly appetites are "leprosy;" sin is "defilement;" lust is "a cruel pestilence;" obedience to instincts is "the bondage of our corruption;" sinful passions are "scabs;" hypocrites are "whited sepulchres;" wealth seeking is "raking muck;" evil practices are "putrid sores;" crafty transactions are "malodorous;" absence of integrity is "rottenness." The wicked are "like the troubled sea when it cannot rest; whose waters cast up mire and dirt." The egotists are, after their kind, cormorants, vampires, leeches, vultures, vipers, toads, spiders and vermin.

Dante, a moral æsthete, is able to give conduct the stamp he wished by his choice of punishments in his *Malebolge*. Flatterers "snort with their muzzles," traitors "bark," fratricides butt together "like two he-goats," thieves become reptiles, falsifiers are covered with scabs, gluttons thrust forth their heads "as in a ditch the frogs stand only with their muzzles out." So Spenser in his *Faerie Queene* shows Envy of "leprous mouth," Lechery "rough and blacke and filthy," Gluttony on a swine, crane-necked and "spuing up his gorge." Tennyson and Browning while less crude are no less emphatic. Thus the wrong is yoked with the foul and the excesses of egoism are associated with disgustful images.

In short, two series of ideas and their correlative feelings are completely blended. Moral excellence is made akin to every other form of excellence. Conformity to the principles of associate life is purity, straightness, whiteness, sweetness, clearness, life, health; while nonconformity is filth, stain, blemish, deformity, disease, decay. By causing the unsocial to appear first as *sin*, or that which is offensive to God, and then as *defilement*, or that which is offensive to man, society exploits first man's reverence and then his fastidiousness.

(d) *By exploiting the sense of the sublime.*—In many the first straying from the ego is not toward fellowship, but toward the vast. Not sympathy, but thirst for largeness, carries them out of themselves. They sicken of self-seeking because individual aims seem petty, and so crave, like Faust, to lay hold on the permanent. Art now turns this to social account. She weans away men still zestful for life by harping on its brevity, frailty, feebleness. By skillful selection and fitting imagery the artist is able to impress with the triviality of life and the insignificance of the individual lot. The consequent quest for a fit aim of endeavor is directed to social advantage by dwelling on the vastness, might, and permanence of society, the nation, or the race. Only the group is worth striving for; it alone can give eternity to one's name or work.

Occasionally one reminds us that society is nothing but people, and if the individual joy or pain be held trivial corporate aims are stricken with a like blight. But such a voice is a jarring note in the chorus. Art leads us into society, and there causes us to repose and rest satisfied. The collective life is magnified till it fascinates with its spaciousness, glorified till it dazzles with its splendor. Thus the stream of dependence and awe that naturally sets out toward the universe is skillfully turned aside and caused to make fruitful the social garden. In a century of *Götterdämmerung* like ours this apotheosis of society is especially marked.

(e) *By perfecting social symbols.*—The grand permanent needs of man get provided for in the ordinary flow of social life. But

in times of struggle a part of society must leave ease, embrace pain, defy their instincts, and act in many respects as irrational beings. Most of those thus devoted can form no mental picture of the good to accrue to others from these sacrifices. Hence they must be moved by unrealities and lured on by symbols. War time, therefore, with its high-beating emotion and its dire need of idealism, is the moment of triumph for the lords of the imagination. During this epoch of illusion the magicians become the chief custodians of the group consciousness, the incarnation of the social spirit. The crisis over, the tempered idealism of religion and morality resumes its sway, and Tyrtæus becomes a Pindar.

Art, with its strong human impulse, will always strive to make pearls of man's drops of sweat. But softening inevitable ills, or winning to present hardship for the sake of a future gain, is easy compared to the task of luring men to the supremest sacrifices for the sake, not of themselves or their near ones, but of society at large. In war stress the artist must be alchemist enough to turn lead into gold. Pain he must make sweet, disease comely, mutilations lovely, and death beautiful. It is his to convince men

that "That length of days is knowing how to die;"¹

"Death for noble ends makes dying sweet;"²

"That death within the sulphurous hostile lines,
In the mere wreck of nobly pitched designs,
Plucks heart's-ease and not rue."²

Ever a considered prudence strives to order the lives of men, but the artist must know how to make the current of emotion foam over restraining bank and dam.

This the artist does by appealing to the æsthetic sense. He sings the pomp and glory of war, its glitter and circumstance, and is silent as to its hideousness. Thanks to this favorite device of poets, painters, and orators, modern warfare is, despite

¹ LOWELL, Ode read at Concord.

² LOWELL, *Memoriæ Positum*.

the field correspondent, about as mythic to the popular mind as the struggles of the gods and the Titans. Or the artist arbitrarily associates the martial and the æsthetic. He envelops the brave man in a cloud of glory and substitutes a halo for a physiognomy. The fallen brave "sleep," while cowards "rot." Soldiers are "heroes," while stay-at-homes are "children," "women," "sweet little men."

But by far the mightiest service of the artist is the perfecting of the symbol. By his mythopœic faculty he transmutes realities and replaces the grisly features of hardship, mutilation, and death with some attractive image. Duty is "God's eldest daughter;" war becomes Mars, Bellona, "Thor's Hammer;" death appears as the Valkyrie, Azrael, the Angel of the Darker Drink, the Valley of the Shadow, "Lethe's sleepy stream;" the sword is the "Iron Bride;" the enemy are "hireling hosts" or "ruffian bands."

Especially is it the duty of the artist

"To body forth that image of the brain
We call our Country, visionary shape,
Loved more than woman, fuller of fire than wine,
Whose charm can none define,
Nor any, though he flee it, can escape!"¹

Symbols for the group arise naturally in the impassioned popular mind. But it needs rare imagination to give these vague shapes that outline and color and life and beauty which enable them to work upon citizens as the image of Helen upon the soul of Faust. Once the prince or king personified the unity of the group and the artist served patriotism by glorifying the leader. With modern states comes a harder task of perfecting and animating a pure symbol—Columbia, La Belle France, or Britannia—that men shall fight for as loyally as for chief or liege. As it is men who rear and defend the state, this group symbol is always feminine, appealing as maid or mother to the strongest affections of man's heart. It is likewise their high symbolic value that explains why queens inspire the most ardent loy-

¹ LOWELL, Ode read at Concord.

alty and make the best modern sovereigns. Could we conceive society in charge of women, we should no doubt get a change in national symbol as significant as the passage in the church from the Madonna-cult to the Jesus-cult. Equally meaning is the fabrication for the symbol for the larger, not the minor, group. It is when the imagination fails to grasp the vast collective life that the symbol is invoked. A Tyrtæus merely reminds of home and altar. A Lowell appeals for his country—

“Smoothing thy gold of war-disheveled hair
On such sweet brows as never other were ;”

or dreams of Truth

“plumed and mailed
With sweet, stern face unveiled
And all-repaying eyes. . . .”

In such way, then—breathing life and charm into symbols that press back realities and enter among the guiding stars of the individual life—does the artist make himself ally and friend of the purposes of society.

(f) *By fascinating with new types.*—What the artist holds up to nature is not always a mirror ; sometimes it is a model. For he may not content himself with putting us in touch with our kind ; he may choose to put us under the spell of exceptional or imaginary people, for whom he would excite admiration rather than fellow feeling. All people long to stamp their lives with distinction, but few there are who can conceive how to do it. To these victims of the commonplace comes the genius with this radiant image or that fascinating figure. He flashes before their eyes a Werther or a Hernani, a Prince Hal or a King Arthur, a Gretchen or a Julie, and they troop after him as children after the Piper of Hämelin. In this way a Calderon, a Rousseau, or a Bunyan leaves his stamp on national character. The welding power of a national literature is partly its power to assimilate a people by molding them over a number of specific types.

The ideal creations, then, of poet or novelist or playwright become mother types and bring forth men and women in their

image each after its kind. "Whole generations of German girls and women," says Nordau, "have formed themselves upon the model of Claudens' female figures, as now upon the Gold Elsie and Geierwallys of recent fiction." The well-dowered darling of the creative artist moving gloriously through an ideal world is as irresistible as was Amadis of Gaul to Don Quixote. Its public yield to its charm as helplessly as iron filings to the magnet or the waters to the moon's attraction. It is a new force abroad in society.¹

Of course the fancy-begotten type may not touch the moral at all. It may be only an arc or crescent of life. The painter may charm us with a mere pose, an expression, or a way of wearing the hair. An actress may create a model as to voice, gait, or manners. Even the rounded types brain-born of genius are not, like "social types," wholly subdued to social ends. They are patterns, not only for our relations to others, but for all manner of choices whatsoever. They are addressed to the individual and embody the genius' conception of how he may live out his life. Yet it is certain that a type like St. Preux, or John Halifax, or Trilby, strongly imbued with the social spirit, will draw its imitators upward and so help a little in the problem of moralization. The artist's ideal therefore may become an ally of social control.

II.

Such aid the artist can give if he will. But will he? Consider first the influences that predispose him to side with society

The group by its might and permanence has peculiar power to stir the imagination and awaken fervor. The nation itself, with its colossal life-drama, is a hero no less splendid than an Achilles or a Beowulf. Who, whether friend of England or foe

¹"Thus the poets and novelists stand like the Jacob of the Bible before the watering-trough and set their 'rods of green poplar, and of the hazel and chestnut tree' in which they have 'piled white strakes' in the gutters and cause 'ring-straked, speckled, and spotted generations to be brought forth as they may choose.'"—NORDAU, *Paradoxes*, "The Import of Fiction."

is not stirred by Matthew Arnold's majestic image of the "weary Titan" "stagging under the too vast orb of her fate"? In the gropings of a vast collective life towards self-consciousness, swift-divining genius finds just that hint which incites it to imagine and to glorify a gigantic group personality.

If he but keep the epic attitude, the artist, however narrow his sympathies, will be apt to cast his influence on the side of order. For though he spurn codes and creeds he cannot disavow that morality which lies at the base of all association. Equally indifferent though he be to all men he will feel the reasonableness and rightness of those sentiments which will not let one live as if there were no other will in the world. So he holds the beam level between clashing individuals he will insensibly be led to consecrate the dictates of an elementary justice. But when he becomes subjective he loses this impartial view. The thoroughly modern and decadent aim of the artist to *express himself*, rather than to give what he sees or imagines, helps to explain the more frequent outcropping in literature of a deeply anti-social individualism.

Again, sociability runs hand in hand with the very technique of the artist. The delight he aims to confer flows from the felt harmony of self with other beings. Despise the multitude as he may, the artist is still alive to the charm of some people, and so after all levels his appeal at our sympathies. Take from his palette love, affinity, and loyalty and there would be little left save the elementary beauty of form and color and motion. Everywhere in works of art we find some clear note of sociability.

The individual artist is often the flower of an entire civilization. He sends his root fibers far and wide into the culture of his time, which culture is already social. Moreover, in whatever medium he works he comes in contact with traditions, canons, models and ideals¹ which have been elaborated for that

¹ "Signs of communal literary culture are to be found in any literature with which the author of the present work is at all acquainted."—POSNETT, *Comparative Literature*, p. 129.

particular art and which exert a shaping pressure on each craftsman. These will tend to limit the caprice and irresponsibility of the individual artist because the standards of every fine art come in time to a sort of *modus vivendi* with the reigning moral and religious standards.

As his work goes much further than his practice it is possible for the artist to help in the moral uplifting of people without living up to his ideals. Singing the praises of friendship, constancy, poverty, independence, toil, simplicity, solitude or patriotism, however much it may move others, happily does not commit the singer to any rash choices. His life is private, his work is public, and while the latter inspires and exalts he may live his life much as other people. The orator or the poet may nerve others to do and die without imitating a Fichte or a Körner. Devotees who take art as the witness of higher beings stand aghast at the gap between the artist's utterance and his life. But the judicious will see in this dualism the chief means whereby art has become the ally of society and a beacon light for moral progress. Only on such terms, perhaps, could the world have the inspiration of a Petrarch, a Rousseau, a Shelley, or a Coleridge. Let us not quarrel with an arrangement that enables each to assist in setting high his neighbor's ideal.

Nevertheless the rarest worth will always be that of the great sincere artists who speak from their heart of hearts and whose work is moral because their natures are profoundly social. Where, as with Æschylus, Dante, Milton, Lessing, Lammenais, or Tolstoi, the art has that indescribable ring of the personality, its mastery will be greatest.

Such are the guarantees that works of art generally shall in respect to social spirit stand above the average man and so draw him *upward*.¹ But we must not suppose that the net result is any such unflinching support of the social order as is given by

¹ Of the four novels — *The Count of Monte Christo*, *Les Misérables*, *Vanity Fair* and *Ben Hur* — which during a recent twenty-three months were drawn more than a thousand times each from the St. Louis Public Library, only one is ethically neutral. Two if not three are profoundly social.

religious beliefs or by moral ideals. Law, belief, religion, ceremony, become institutions. This implies two things: that they repose on a consensus and will not obey the will of one man; that they get organized and so act in a measure independently of the wills at any moment in charge of them. A system of belief, for instance, goes on with its tremendous momentum dealing out bane and blessing on behalf of the central requirements of society in an almost automatic way. Art, on the other hand, being very little of an institution, will not bless that which it can see no good in. Born of the zeal and sympathy of individuals it holds no brief for the established order. It will exalt self-sacrifice for persons. But the impersonal requirements, the exactions that protect not people but institutions, the inobvious necessities of restraint occasioned by the social division of labor—these too often the artist misunderstands and so rages blindly against. Willful, moody, and erratic, this member of the *genus irritabile vatum* is ever shaking off the dust of his shoes against the *de facto* order, flouting authority and stirring people up against restraints. The more downright forms of control he detests, while he exalts spontaneity and has great faith in the appeal to sympathy. And so it comes about that art, while fighting in the main on the side of society, has not the steady stroke of church or state.

III.

Other guarantees for the sociality of art are found in the control society exercises over it.

This control is by hindrance and by furtherance.

We see hindrance in official censors, in the licensing of play houses, in the suppression of "The Clemenceau Case," in the exclusion of the *Kreuzer Sonata* from the mails, in the shutting out of "Le Debacle" from French garrisons. Besides the authorities we have librarians, hanging committees, art juries, monument boards, reputable publishers, and responsible periodicals conspiring to check the raid of the immoral artists upon the public. Behind these hovers a cloud of critics and every work

of art must run the gauntlet of them ere it can gain easy access to the multitude. Flanking these are the church with its Index, the pulpit with its thunders against the stage, W. C. T. U.'s, Y. M. C. A.'s, mothers' associations and reading clubs down to the local oracle and the village Dogberry. What with censor, police, critic, priest, schoolmaster and matron, the hindrances society can oppose to a demoralizing work of art are very considerable.

Still more effective is the furtherance given to that which is deemed most salutary and wholesome. A great quantity of artwork is selected and paid for by society. The literature conned in the schools, the libraries of barracks and ships, the eloquence of senates, the oratory and poetry of public occasions, the frescoes of public buildings, the collections in public galleries and museums, the repertory of subsidized theaters, the art in churches and cathedrals—on these the social purgation shows as plainly as the patronage of the Bourbons shows on the battle pieces at Versailles. Add now to this the effect of general praise and commendation, the favor shown one class of literature by the church, the fillip given another by the "family" magazine, and it will be evident that the policy of society toward art is anything but *laissez faire*.

Abandon though we may all official censorship, so long as society spontaneously organizes itself into a hierarchy of leaders and led, of makers and takers of opinion, it will be possible greatly to let or hinder the access of the artist to the public. Let those of influence but appreciate the moral bearing of art, and the universal impulse of everyone to look out for his neighbor's morals will do the rest.

Artists resenting the yoke of morality have coined the absurd phrase "art for art's sake," and with it have bewildered not a few. To meet this cry with empty assertions of the "moral purpose of art," the "moral obligations laid upon the artist," is but to heap up chaff. But put "social" for "moral" and the situation becomes clear.

The realists, naturalists, and veritists assert that art is an individual affair, that one has the right to speak, print, or publish

anything he pleases or that he can get another to like. Art as Master of Revels and Dispenser of Delights cannot attain its utmost unless unfettered by conventionalities. To naysay the free access of artist to patron is to mutilate art, kill inspiration, and cut off humanity from choice springs of enjoyment.

For society to concede any such claim would be sheer folly. What madness, when we are all the time besetting the individual with our theologies and religions and ideals, and can scarcely keep him in order at that, to let the irresponsible artist get at him and undo our work! Why give art *carte blanche* when there is scarcely a speculation abroad regarding the other world which has not been shaped by considerations of this world's discipline? When sober Reason has scarcely won *Lehrfreiheit* it is over-early to emancipate the Artistic Imagination.¹

By whom art shall be supervised is another question. All attempts to lodge the supervision of art in any man or board have done more harm than good. By brutal suppression they consecrate the established order and turn artists into sycophants or revolutionists. It may be best that the fate of the artist's work be decided by the ten thousand influential, subject to an appeal to the million uninfluential. Then let the indefinite public ban without ruth or scruple whatever gives moral offense. In this way it is possible to enforce the amenableness of art to society without asserting its amenableness to law.

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¹ In France, where "Hands off!" has been the maxim, the demoralization traceable to anti-social art has given rise to a strong movement for social control. The Beringer Bill, which is likely to become a law, punishes not only the publication or sale of an immoral book or picture but even the possession of it.